

The Western Whirlwind

Western North Dakota Women of the ELCA

December 2025

From the President's Desk

by Michelle Lauckner

It's time to start preparing for our Biennial Convention for Western North Dakota (WND) Synodical Women's Organization (SWO) – this means you...ALL WOMEN of the ELCA in western NoDak! We'd sure love to have you join us as we try a new kind of convention. We're working together with Camp of the Cross Ministries to combine our efforts and create a more retreat-like experience for this biennial event. Please save the date in your calendar RIGHT NOW: Friday & Saturday, October 23 & 24, 2026, and plan to join us as we dig into the "GIFTS" we have each been given.

This past quarter, I've had a lot of busy days as an ELCA congregant and your WND WELCA SWO president. We've recently enjoyed the season of fall cluster gatherings. I was delighted to be able to join with three of our seven clusters at their annual fall events. I joined the women of my home cluster at the Western Prairie Cluster gathering hosted by Zion Lutheran Church in Berthold & Carpio Lutheran Church women and thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship with some old friends (Hi Janet Cron!) and new (Hello Lisa Maki!) – just to name a few!

A handful of SWO board members and WELCA friends joined me in attending the Badlands Cluster gathering, with a very inspiring speaker. I really want to acknowledge the heartfelt discussion held at the

cluster meeting and salute two brave young women that volunteered to keep the cluster alive and represented. Bless you Cathy Hendrickson and Dawn Egan in feeling that nudge and accepting this call to serve and support the women of faith in your communities!

And the final cluster gathering I was able to attend this fall was with the Upper Missouri Cluster - what a great day of love & welcoming of the spirit! Our shared learning focused on uncluttering our hearts & lives, while making room for God's presence. Each event has warmed my heart and reminded me of the value of these faith groups!

I was unable to attend the other gatherings due to a conflict invitation to the ELCA Churchwide offices in Chicago where I joined 38 other individuals for an Innovation Leadership Summit! What an honor to be welcomed into this first-time event, learning how to delve into strategies to grow our church as a welcoming home, "Designed for Belonging." (This was the theme of the learning resources and education we were provided.) I intend to use the strategies that I learned to make WND WELCA more engaging as a place for any and all women looking for support in their faith lives. Please reach out to me for more information about these strategies or to work with me.

More information about The Innovation Lab can be found here:



<https://www.elca.org/our-work/congregations-and-synods/innovationlab/innovation-in-action>

And here:
<https://linktr.ee/elcainnovation>

Mission Statement of the Western North Dakota Synodical Women of the ELCA Newsletter "The Western Whirlwind"

To inform Women of the ELCA in Western North Dakota about happenings within their Churchwide and Synodical organization and Clusters, and to provide readers with stories and articles that interest, inspire, and encourage them in their faith lives.

Adopted March 1999

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NOTE: The unit President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer receive a free copy of the *Whirlwind* **IF** we have correct addresses. Please submit your Unit Update Form annually or whenever there is an officer change.

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Women of the ELCA

Views from the Vice President

“Grace”

By Shirley Teske

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. Titus 2:11-14



There is one gift all of us need and we need it every day throughout the year: 365 days. A gift all of us should want for Christmas in 2025 is the gift of **GRACE**!

Grace. The theologians among us will hear that word and think, “AHA! Grace...the unmerited favor of God.” Good definition. And I surely need that. But the grace I am thinking of is down one level, a bit more mundane. I also need the grace, the unmerited favor, of friends and neighbors, and especially my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Why grace? Because somehow, over the course of our lives, we have seen what appears to be an inexorable shrinkage of the pool of grace available in our world. It is getting meaner and meaner and meaner out there. Have you noticed? We are a society that wants **WHAT** it wants, **WHEN** it wants it, and the **WAY** it wants it. And heaven help anyone who would dare to disappoint us, even inadvertently. If someone fails to meet our expectations, they should be fired or sued. History may look on ours as a “civilized” society, but we have become a not very “civil” society, haven’t we? Where is the grace anymore?

We have become a society of evil and hatred toward others. Have you said “No” to temptations that will lead you astray from God? We live in a *kosmos*—a world opposed to God—a world that is very often demonic—a world that tempts us hundreds of times a day to think thoughts and to perform acts that would be self-destructive and would separate us from God. Why do you think there is so much evil in the world? The evil is prevalent in the news we hear every night, but the great news is that God loves this *kosmos* and sent His Son to save it (John 3:16), but the *kosmos* won’t be fully redeemed until Christ comes again. John 3:19 says “*the light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.*”

We need to allow God’s grace to instruct us in ways that will help us to deny the ungodliness and worldly lusts that we find all around us. We deny temptation every day so that makes us stronger to face the next temptation. We become stronger in the Lord every time we deny temptations.

We are to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present time while we are patiently waiting for the blessed hope, which is Jesus Christ who gave of himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The story of Christmas is, at its heart, a story of grace. The coming of Jesus Christ into our world over 2,000 years ago is the affirmation of God’s unmerited favor to us. Scripture is clear. In churches which follow the Lectionary on Christmas Eve, people are hearing not only the account of Christ’s birth in the 2nd chapter of Luke, but also a brief epistle lesson from Titus, chapter 2 where Paul writes, “For the **GRACE** of God has appeared...Jesus... bringing salvation to all...” Grace – the essence of Christmas.

Someone has suggested that love is like the Bible’s loaves and fishes – it works best when given away. I think it is the same with grace. Perhaps we will have a more grace-filled society if we in the church who have been the recipients of God’s marvelous grace in Christ Jesus will take it upon ourselves to begin giving it away. I can promise it will make a difference in every one of your lives. Let us be eager to do what is good and do it joyfully and not with a grudging heart.

Grace. That is what I want for Christmas this year...GRACE. You too? And I want to be a grace-giver to you and everyone you meet this coming year, because I know that will begin to make this world more the place that the gracious God who invites us to “Christmas dinner” wants it to be like.

Secretary's Notes



“Prepare...Pray...Be Positive”

By Helen Grant

Therefore, *Prepare* your minds for action; be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1Peter 1:13

You Prepare a table before me. Ps 23 *Who will Prepare* the way before me? Mal 3

PREPARE: A word we use every day. We wake up and Prepare for the day – Hopefully starting the day with Prayer. The word Prepare is used 16 times in the Bible. Everything we do involves Preparing – our tasks for the day, food, what we read, where we go, and then doing all things with positiveness, love and kindness. The common things like Preparing coffee in the morning to the most challenging things like planning a trip, dealing with the weather, or dealing with hardships or other problems we have – they all take Preparing for.

Christmas is a time for Preparing – the stores started in August preparing us to buy, decorate and plan for the important Holiday. In our Christian world Advent is the season to prepare for Christ's birth---*The Reason for the Season!* The Christmas programs, Christmas parties, baking, Preparing Christmas cards and presents, decorating and all the other special events we do -these are what brings us the wonderful story of Christ being born.

It is important to Prepare ourselves to do what we must do and yet make it a “want to” not a “have to” chore. Making it fun and special and simple Prepares us with the true meaning of Christmas. Working with friends and going with family and friends to the special events the Christmas Season brings is what makes memories that you will cherish forever.

It is the time to Prepare for the Birth of Christ – the Reason for the Season! – remembering that people are more important than the gifts. I'm going to Prepare better this year – I will not put my cooked turkey in the garage to keep cool – and someone put the dogs in the garage, and they enjoyed our dinner! I had to Prepare a Plan B!

Another PREPARE: Cluster Secretary's it is time again for the Cluster Gathering Reports to be Prepared. UNIT Secretary's also Prepare the Unit Officer Form for 2026 after your elections and send to Helen, Cheryl and Linda. Thank you!!

Still another PREPARE: The SWO Triennial is July 16-19, 2026, in Des Moines, IA. Our WND SWO Biennial will be October 23 & 24th 2026 at the Camp of the Cross in Garrison. There are scholarships available to help your ladies go to these wonderful events. WND SWO has scholarships to go to both events. Your Cluster may have a scholarship fund. Also check with your Church Unit and they often will help people go to these events also.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year !!! JESUS is The Reason for the SEASON!



Treasurer's Reflections

"Isn't It Funny"

By Linda Hanson

I found this taped in the back of my mom's Bible while working on a sermon. A few of the amounts mentioned may need to be adjusted to current amounts, but the sentiments are still true today.

Funny how a \$10 bill looks so big when you take it to worship, but so small when you take it to the supermarket

Funny how reading the church newsletter is a chore but reading a 30-page newspaper every day is a habit you've come to enjoy.

Funny how long an hour is spent in worship, but how short it is when golfing, fishing or attending a ballgame.

Funny how we applaud when the ball game goes into overtime, but we complain if the worship goes over the regular time.

Funny how much difficulty some have learning the simple Gospel enough to tell others, but how simple it is for the same people to understand and explain far more difficult topics.

Funny how we can't fit a church meeting into our schedules with a year to plan for it, but we can adjust the schedule at a moment's notice for other events.

Funny that parents are so concerned about their children's school lesson but are completely unconcerned about Bible lessons.

Funny how everyone wants to go to heaven provided he or she doesn't have to believe, or to think, or to say, or to do anything.

All of this would be funny... IF...it wasn't so tragic!

Matthew 6:24 in the RSV reads **No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon** (money). It is so easy for the "worldly things" to become a priority in our daily life. We must work hard to keep God as the priority every day.



REMINDER: All checks sent to me, Linda Hanson, synodical treasurer should be made out to:

WOMEN OF THE ELCA

Use the memo line to indicate the designation, such as WISE, Whirlwind subscription, Katie's Fund, CAR Rebuild and Recovery, etc.

Thank you to all units and individuals for remembering the ministry of Women of the ELCA in your gifts and prayers.



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If your mailing address changes, please notify Cheryl Lacey, the Whirlwind editor. (contact info on page 2). Once the time limit for forwarding to the new address has been reached the Post Office will send a notice of *Forwarding Expired* and charge us \$.90 for each piece of mail.

You may also request to change to free email delivery of the Whirlwind (for all issues or only the winter months) by contacting Cheryl.

From the Cluster Presidents/Reps

Lonetree

By Marilyn Saueressig



Recently, I purchased a fall picture. On it, it reads, *"Family is life's greatest blessing."* In the past few weeks, I have felt so very blessed.

The fall colors are so beautiful! I've rented a home in my hometown—seeing leaves of all colors, raking, and bagging leaves was such an enjoyment! (Raking on the farm doesn't happen often!)

Our Fall Cluster Gathering was October 11th at Grace Lutheran, McClusky. The theme was "A Peaceful Kingdom – Blessings" from Matthew 5:3–10. A nice assortment of love gifts and money went to the Sheridan County Food Pantry.

Young people from Our Savior's, Mercer, and St. Olaf, Turtle Lake, spoke and showed slides of their mission trip to Kentucky to help hurricane disaster victims. It was good to hear their enthusiasm and comments that they would do it again if given the chance!

We broke out into groups for officer training. Pastor Nicole Johnson led Bible study focusing on "Blessings." Our Spring Gathering will be at St. Olaf

Lutheran, rural Turtle Lake with the election of officers on the agenda.

We started the morning and afternoon with singing. I grew up singing in the school choir, a madrigal group, and church choir. I especially love church hymns. Singing the words gives me a feeling of hope, joy, peace, and a closeness to God that cannot be denied.

We, as "Sisters in Christ," continue to Act Boldly, supporting one another.

Be thinking of attending the 2026 Western North Dakota Women of the ELCA Biennial Convention and the Women of the ELCA 13th Triennial Gathering, July 16–19, 2026, in Des Moines, Iowa.

Listen – "God is Calling"

Co-President, Lonetree Cluster
Marilyn Saueressig

East Missouri

By Connie Isaak



So many psalms are poems encouraging us to praise God. In Psalm 66, "ALL the earth is

encouraged to make a joyful shout". How do we do this? – maybe by singing, whispering thanks, drawing, writing, telling stories... I remember listening to the older generation share their stories from their experiences. I need to remember to share with those younger than me when God helped me feel unexpected strength or courage or love. Story telling needs to continue because it weaves us together – just like a quilt.

Peace Lutheran Church in Lincoln hosted our East Missouri Cluster gathering on October 11th. We enjoyed a delicious lunch, followed by a devotion lead by Pastor Kevin Nelson. During our business meeting, we shared our experiences from the community project at Missouri Slope Lutheran Care Center in Bismarck. It was felt we need to continue giving back to our communities. We were invited to Steele in April. Gregory Loftness shared lots of good information during his Alzheimer's presentation. Half of our offering was given to the Alzheimer's Walk that was held earlier that day.

Peace Lutheran operates a food pantry from their church. Even though they are a smaller church in number of congregants, the impact they have in this area is powerful and greatly appreciated. Love gifts were given to help in this mission.

Even though some of our Cluster churches may not have active Board members, their donation of quilts, kits, food pantry items are wonderful ways of Praising God.

From the Cluster Presidents/Reps

Western Prairie

By Judy Jarmin



Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust in the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, And its leaves shall stay green; In the year of drought it is not anxious, And it does not cease to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17: 7-8

Did you catch a spark? Are you ready to Pass it on? If you attended the Western Prairie Cluster at Zion Lutheran Church in Berthold, ND on September 13, you're ready.

The event was hosted by Zion Lutheran and Carpio Lutheran. Roll Call was taken and items collected were given to the Berthold Food Pantry. Besides the mountain of donations, \$1,190.00 was collected, including a \$250.00 Thrivent card thanks to Mike Lauckner of Thrivent. Thank you, Carol, for your report on this Food Pantry.

The Love Offering went to the Carpio Lutheran Church Flood damage. \$1767.00 was collected. In the Fall the Worship Offering is

divided between the SWO and WPC Scholarship fund. \$1898.00 was collected.

We were led in with music by Nancy and Julie and welcomed by Zion's Women's group President Jill Brown. Heather Feland, SAM Minister, blessed us with a message and opening prayer.

The sparks really started to fly once our guest speaker Sue Hamilton took the stage. This is a woman with an incredible story. Her path to Christ was a little bumpy. God uses people to inspire others, and Sue does just that. Sue talks about the importance of prayer and of using our skills. You never know when someone is watching you. We need to Pass On our Heritage. If you ever have a chance to hear Sue speak, I highly recommend it.

Those Berthold and Carpio ladies sure know how to feed a crowd of ladies. We thank them for the delicious food. There were morning coffee and treats, a fabulous lunch, and afternoon coffee and treats. The decorations included a little campfire (pretend of course) at each table. They even let me take one home for my table.

The afternoon session began with more music from Nancy and Julie and included a musical duet by Julie and Donna. These ladies are sure passing on their gifts for our enjoyment.

The training was done by the officers, and I sure hope some of it was beneficial to the individual officers attending.

Michelle Lauckner, our SWO President, spoke to us about the importance of our WELCA groups. So much is going on in our country, and she encouraged us to pray and support one another in our faith journey,

No Cluster seems to be complete without a skit by the Board, so your WPC Board tried their hand at a camping skit. The sparks were really flying as we came up with ideas on how to get young people involved and to keep our Cluster going.

I am so grateful to all the women on the WPC board, and I want to thank the Berthold and Carpio Women for hosting the Cluster.

One week after the WPC I had the opportunity to attend the Badlands Cluster Fall Gathering with 4 other ladies. It was great and I learned so much, I learned that not everyone runs their meeting the same. I saw a Cluster struggling and I saw 2 young ladies step up to keep it going. Praise God.

The Holidays will soon be upon us, and I pray you all have a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Facebook users check out the Western Prairie Cluster Facebook page. www.facebook.com/westernprairiecluster

WND SWO
WELCA webpage:

www.wndsynod.org/synod-women-of-the-elca

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From the Cluster Presidents/Reps

Turtle Mountain

By Taryce Olson

Thankful (adj.)-Feeling or expressing gratitude and appreciation; feeling joy for the small things, the big things, and everything in between; relishing the experiences, moments and loved ones in our lives.

The month of November is for remembering to be thankful and is a time for gratitude. There is such a phrase as "Thankful Thursday" and I would like to challenge you during the month of November to write down 3 things you are thankful for every Thursday! Being thankful and the term gratitude go hand in hand. Gratitude grows when you practice it. Practicing gratitude strengthens your relationships by making you more appreciative of that person.

Sometimes we forget how important the "small things" are to our lives. In our workplace, showing gratitude can improve morale and increase productivity. What a wonderful benefit. In this uncertainty with our jobs and our pay, to be thankful for our friends in faith, our family and our co-workers boost our spirits and may even lower the stress we are feeling.

Thank you for all of the WOMEN in this organization. What a blessing you are to us. I pray that this November, your heart may be lifted with gratitude and may you be thankful for God's peace, God's love, God's strength, and His joy that overflows in your life.



Thanksgiving Prayer:

Thank you for the miracles we are too blind to see,
And give us new awareness of the many gifts from Thee,
Help us to remember that the key to life and living,
Is to make each prayer, a prayer of thanks.
And each day, a day of Thanksgiving.

The Western Whirlwind

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From the Cluster Presidents/Reps

Heart River

By Sharon Heilman



Heart River Fall Gathering was Saturday October 11 at Zion Lutheran Church in Beulah. The morning started with coffee, muffins and fellowship. The verse for the day was *"Do not worry about tomorrow"* Matthew 6:34a. For devotions we read verses from Matthew and sang verses from the hymn *Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God* in between readings.

Brenda Owen from Summit Counseling in Stanton was the guest speaker. They provide a range of mental health and substance abuse services, including counseling, medication management, addiction services and recovery housing for residents in western North Dakota. She told her story and how she got it all started.

We had a potato bar for lunch. We had 30 ladies registered, along with the guest speaker and 6 women and 3 girls working in the kitchen. Our Love Offering and half the Gathering Offering went to

Summit Counseling and they received \$1091.00 along with some non-perishable items for their pantry.

Spring Gathering for Heart River will be Saturday April 25, 2026, at House of Prayer in Bismarck with Heaven Helpers Closet 701 as the speaker.

We closed the day with the business meeting and communion service served by Val Saylor. Zion ladies gave everyone a church cookbook. It was a wonderful day of fellowship.

Badlands

Badlands Cluster held their Fall Cluster Gathering Saturday, September 20th at Belfield Lutheran Church. The theme of the day was *"A Season of Change"*.

The morning session was open to the public and was well attended. The group laughed, cried and was encouraged by inspirational speaker Deb Hadley. Deb told the story of how tragedies in her life led her to start KT Humble Hearts Foundation to help others deal with grief. Please visit www.debhadley.com to find out more about this wonderful ministry.

After a delicious lunch the business meeting was called to order. Like many of our clusters, Badlands officers had reached their term limits and there were no volunteers to serve going forward. Western ND SWO President, Michelle Lauckner had been in contact with the Churchwide WELCA organization regarding this issue and she shared several options for the Cluster. After thoughtful

discussion the group decided to move forward without an elected board of officers but would designate 2 contact people from the Cluster to represent Badlands on the SWO Board and communicate information with the Badlands churches.

Many thanks to Dawn Egan from Beach and Cathy Hendrickson from Reeder who agreed to be Badlands Contacts.

Cathy shared this introductory message: "I am a member of Peace Lutheran Church in Scranton, ND. My husband and I recently moved from Colorado back to North Dakota and are semi-retired. I work at a local hospital as a Physical Therapist. My husband, Paul is a SAM minister, and we are getting more involved in the workings of our congregation".



july 16-19, 2026 ✨ des moines, iowa

Join us at the 2026 Gathering in Des Moines, Iowa!

Visit www.welcatg.org for hotel information and registration forms.

Now available: links to information on the Gathering speakers, chaplains, workshop, worship and bible study leaders!

From the Cluster Presidents/Reps



Upper Missouri

By Brenda Ekness & Nina Williams

Dear Friends,

October 4th brought many UM cluster members to Wildrose for a fun-filled day of fellowship, food, faith, and friendship. Thank you to all who came and brought winter hats, gloves, scarves, and socks for our over-flowing Love Offering table! These items were divided between the tri-county Social Service agencies in our cluster area and will be a welcome sight to many people braving the cold this winter.

Wildrose Women of Grace were so welcoming and hosted a beautifully decorated venue for the event along with providing a delicious meal and snacks. Thank you, ladies! Hosting a cluster event is not light work....but, it is fun work! Ladies, I can't stress enough how enjoyable these days are to gather together to make new friends and see old friends, learn from each other, and to relish together in the camaraderie of sisterhood on this ever changing-ever blessed path of life as we seek to learn more about Jesus, and to thank Him for all He has provided for us. Thank you to President Michelle and Pastor Tera for spending the day with us as well!

Our UM cluster board met to discuss the recent fall cluster; to share what went well, and ideas of what we want to improve future cluster events. Lots of ideas were rolling! We also discussed our new scholarship program. Half of our fall offering went to SWO, and the other half was designated for scholarships for the 2026 Biennial and Triennial conventions. We want to encourage attendance at these events, and information will be shared with each unit as we learn more.

Our theme this fall was on living simply and being thankful for all that we have....especially being thankful for the gift of Jesus' love for us. This brings us to thinking about the season of Advent that we are currently in.

The Christmas season is often a whirlwind of decorating, shopping, and endless to-do lists, leaving many of us feeling more frazzled than fulfilled. We search for meaning, and often our thoughts go back to simpler times of Christmases past. Times when families enjoyed a big meal served on beautiful china while sitting around the table enjoying Mom's and Grandma's delicious meal entrees. Or by singing Christmas carols, or maybe the children acting out the Nativity, or possibly Dad reading the Christmas story; all before opening the long awaited and thoughtfully shopped for Christmas presents! Maybe afterward your family enjoyed dessert...could it have been one of those ice cream rolls, covered in crushed nuts, with the green shaped Christmas tree in the center? Following dessert, it was soon time to get the cookies and milk ready for the much-anticipated visit from Santa! And did the animals in the barn really kneel down at midnight in reverence of Jesus' birth?

Over two thousand years ago, the world was just as chaotic as now, just in different ways. It was into this brokenness that a guiding light appeared – not in a palace, but in a humble stable in Bethlehem. When the angel announced “good news of great joy for all the people”; it wasn't just news for a single day, but for forever going forward, and was a revolutionary message of hope for this weary world.

The Christmas story reminds us that God comes to us not through perfection, but through love and brokenness. Jesus came to shepherd us and to give His life for us. The real gift we receive - and are called to give - is the gift of grace, love, and compassion for our neighbors, the poor, and the lonely.

This Christmas, let's remember that we have an opportunity to pause and reflect on this true meaning of Christmas. Instead of getting lost in the hustle and bustle, we can *choose* to be a blessing for others. Whether through an act of kindness, a moment of quiet reflection on the nativity scene, or by simply extending a Christmas greeting with those we meet. We, too, can be a messenger of love and salvation for Jesus!

Oh my, what it must have been like to actually witness the miracle of Jesus' birth all those 2,000 years ago. I am in awe of that little baby in the manger. He is my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And yours, too.

(continued on page 13)

Stewardship (Mission Action)

Stewardship Is A Privilege

By Judy Jarmin

There is so much talk this time of the year regarding Stewardship. How much money can you give, where can you use your time, and what are your talents? There was a time when this talk would have made me uncomfortable. I thought *I can't sing or play piano, so I have no talent. My time is so precious with family and friends, I surely can't take on anymore. And, money, who has extra money?*

Then one day I heard Stewardship explained in a different way and it changed my thinking.

"You will understand stewardship when you stop thinking of it as an obligation and think of it as a privilege."

It's true, I still can't sing, but I am a great baker and hostess, and I even like organizing things. It's true my time is precious but if I give up some TV or phone time, I could do that visitation. Its true money is tight, but if I give first, the rest will just fall into place. How blessed I am to have food, shelter, and clothing. How blessed I am to have freedom of choice. It really is a privilege to support the work of my church, my community, and my country.

Justice (Mission Community)

by Sharon Heilman

Elder Fraud

Each year millions of elderly Americans fall victims of some type of financial fraud or confidence scheme including romance, lottery, grandparents or sweepstakes scams just to name a few.

Criminals will gain their targets' trust and may communicate with them directly online, over the phone, through mail or through TV or radio. Once successful, scammers often keep a scheme going because of the prospect of significant financial gain.

Seniors are often targeted because they tend to be trusting and polite. They also usually have financial savings, own a home, and have good credit. All which makes them attractive to scammers.

Seniors may be less inclined to report fraud because they don't know how or are too ashamed at having been scammed. They might also be concerned that their relatives will lose confidence in their abilities to manage their own financial affairs. And when an elderly victim does report a crime, they may be unable to supply detailed information to investigators.

With the elderly population growing and seniors racking up more than \$3 billion in losses annually, elder fraud has remained a growing problem.

How to protect yourself:

- *Recognize scam attempts and end all communication with perpetrator
 - *Create a shared verbal family password
 - *Resist the pressure to act quickly
 - *Call police if you feel danger
- *Be cautious of unsolicited phone calls, mailings and door-to-door services
 - *Never give or send personal information
- *Never open an email attachment from someone you don't know and be careful what you download

If you or someone you know has been a victim of elder fraud call

NATIONAL ELDER FRAUD HOTLINE 833-372-8311

Discipleship (Mission Growth) by Brenda Ekness

The phrase 'follow me' is often heard, but what does it mean to truly follow someone, especially 'someone' like Jesus Christ? I feel the following story illustrates discipleship so simply and completely:

In the heart of a bustling marketplace, young Elara, known for her quick wit and even quicker hands, found herself drawn to the quiet wisdom of Master Elias. He wasn't a merchant or a craftsman, but a storyteller, and his tales of the unseen world captivated her. One day, after a particularly moving story about compassion, Elara approached Elias, "Master," she said, "how can I learn to live like that? To be so kind, so understanding?" Elais smiled, a gentle crinkle around his kind eyes. "It begins, little sparrow, with a single seed of kindness planted in your own heart. Tend to it, nurture it, and watch it grow."

He then invited her to join him in his work. Not as an apprentice learning a trade, but as a fellow traveler on a journey of the heart. Elara, hesitant at first, found herself drawn to the simple acts of service Elias performed – tending to the sick, comforting the sorrowful, sharing stories with the children. She learned to listen without judgment, to offer a hand without expecting anything in return. One evening, as they walked home under the starlit sky, Elara confessed her doubts. "Master, I still get frustrated. I still get angry. I don't know if I can truly be like you." Elias stopped, his gaze steady. "My dear Elara, we are all flawed, all prone to stumble. But the beauty of this path is that we are not alone. We are called to learn, to grow, and to encourage one another. Let your stumbles be a lesson, not a reason to despair"

He then told her a story of a young sapling, battered by storms, yet reaching for the sun. "Even the strongest trees have faced adversity, but they continue to grow, reaching for the light. So too, will you. Let your heart be your guide and let your faith be your strength."

From that day on, Elara continued to learn and grow, not just from Elias, but from the people she encountered, the challenges she faced, and the love she offered. She learned that discipleship wasn't about perfection, but about a journey of love, learning, and growth, one small step at a time.

Let us pray, *"Lord, help me to be a better follower of Jesus. Show me how to love like Him, live like Him, and show His love with others. Make me a true disciple. Amen"*

This prayer is simple, yet it encompasses the core aspects of discipleship: learning, living, and sharing.

Your fellow disciple in Christ, Brenda Ekness





There is one Christmas carol that has always baffled me: *What in the world do leaping lords, French Hens, swimming swans and especially the partridge that won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas? Today I found out!*

Why were these 12 days important? From 1558 to 1829 Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during the era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of the church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality, which the children could remember!

A Partridge in a Pear Tree: The partridge in a pear tree represents Jesus, the Son of God. Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge, the only bird that will die to protect its young.

Two Turtle doves: These twin birds represent the Old and New Testaments. So, in this gift, the singer finds the complete story of the Christian faith and God's plan for the world.

Three French Hens: These birds represent faith, hope, and love. This gift refers to 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter written by the Apostle Paul. It also represents the Holy Trinity: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Four Calling Birds: One of the easiest facets of the song's code to figure out these are the four Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Five Golden Rings: The gift of the rings represents the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah or the Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

Six Geese a-Laying: These lyrics can be traced back to the first story found in the Bible. Each egg is a day in creation when God “hatched” or formed the world.

Seven Swans a-Swimming: It would take someone quite familiar with the Bible to identify this gift. Hidden in the code are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Giving, Leading, and Compassion.

Eight Maids-a-Milking: The Eight Maids represent the 8 Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:3-10.

Nine Ladies Dancing: These nine dancers were really the gifts known as the fruit of the Spirit. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control.

Ten Lords A-leaping: This is probably the easiest gift to understand. As lords were judges and in charge of the law, this code for the Ten Commandments was fairly straightforward to Christians.

Eleven Pipers Piping: This is almost a trick question, as most think of the disciples in terms of the dozen. But when Judas betrayed Jesus, only eleven men carried out the gospel message. Therefore, the Eleven Pipers Piping signify the 11 Faithful Disciples:

Twelve Drummers Drumming: The drummers are the 12 of beliefs in the Apostles' Creed.

This year the Twelve Days of Christmas 2025 will begin on Thursday, December 25, and end on Monday, January 5, 2026.

(continued from page 10)

On the internet, there is a most meaningful picture of a simple manger, filled with hay, with a swaddling cloth lying simply across the surface. The caption above the manger reads,

"The first Christmas was simple. It's okay if yours is too."

Dear Upper Missouri Cluster and the entire Western ND SWO

May the joy of Christ's birth fill your hearts this Christmas.

Joy to the World!

Brenda and Nina





We offer scholarships in two categories:

Scholarships for Lutheran laywomen

The purpose of the Scholarship for Lutheran laywomen is to provide assistance to women studying for a career other than ordained ministry. General funds for this scholarship come from the Cronk, First Triennium Board, General, Mehring, Paepke, Piero/Wade/Wade, Edwin/Edna Robeck Opportunity Scholarship for Lutheran Laywomen along with funds for specific opportunities from Arne Administrative Scholarship, Schmieder Leadership Scholarship, Amelia Kemp Scholarship, Belmer, Kahler, Vickers/Raup Funds and Irene Drinkall Franke, Mary Seeley Knudstrup Funds.

Administrative leadership: The Arne Administrative Scholarship provides assistance to women interested in reaching the top of their field as administrators. The additional education may be pursued through full-time school attendance, night courses, or summer sessions.

ELCA college and seminary leadership: The Schmieder Leadership Scholarship provides assistance to women administrators and faculty at ELCA colleges and seminaries who wish to participate in leadership training and management training institutes.

Women of color leaders: The Amelia Kemp Scholarship provides assistance to ELCA women of color in undergraduate, graduate, professional, or vocational courses of study.

ELCA service abroad: The Belmer, Kahler, Vickers/Raup Funds provides assistance to women preparing for ELCA service abroad, either in general or in health professions.

Christian service: The Irene Drinkall Franke, Mary Seeley Knudstrup Funds provides assistance to women as they take graduate courses preparing them for occupations in Christian service.

Link to applications and other essential documents:

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/scholarships/essential-information-for-lutheran-laywomen-scholarships>

Scholarship for ordained ministry

The Herbert W. and Corinne Chilstrom Scholarship provides assistance to Lutheran women during their final year at an ELCA seminary. Candidates must be preparing for ordained ministry in the ELCA and must have been endorsed by their synodical candidacy committee.

Link to application

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OrdainedMinistryapplication2024fillableR.pdf>

Application Timeline

December 15: Women of the ELCA begins accepting scholarship applications online. Link to materials becomes available on this day.

April 5: All applications must be submitted online on or before this date.

Late June: Scholarship recipients are notified.

Scholarship Fund

Support scholarships for Lutheran women pursuing their call to ministry, business, education and more.

Link to donate to Scholarship Fund:

<https://community.elca.org/WELCAScholarships>

Western North Dakota Women of the ELCA

Are you ready for something new and exciting in 2026?

Instead of the traditional convention format for the next Western ND WELCA biennial convention the SWO board has decided on a different experience for convention goers. Working with the staff of Camp of the Cross Ministries near Garrison the board is planning a two-day retreat-like event. The convention theme will focus on "Gifts". Gifts we have received and gifts we can share with others.

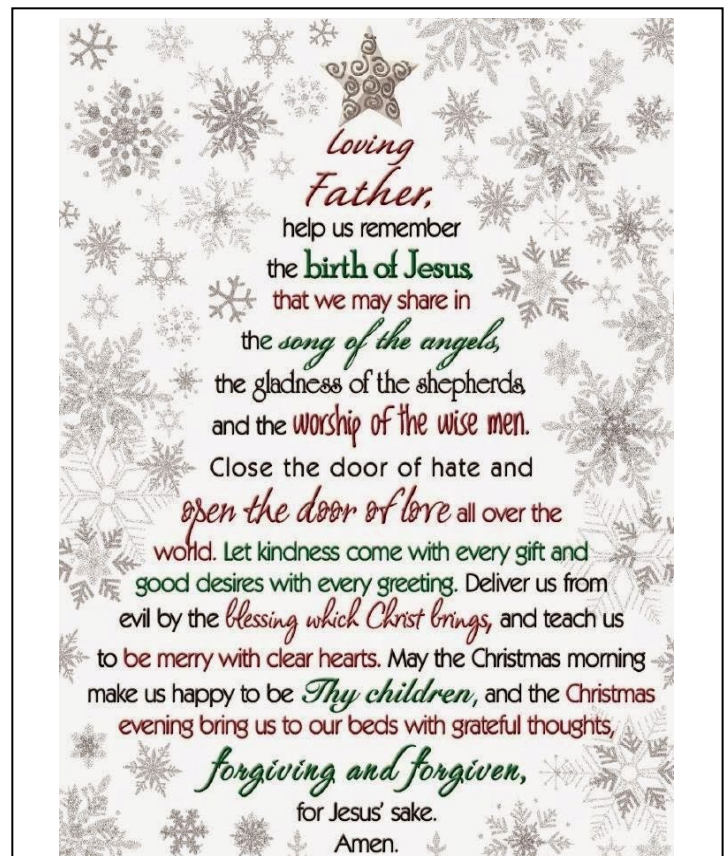


So, please mark Friday & Saturday, **October 23-24, 2026**, on your calendars. Spread the word among the women of your congregations and make plans to attend.

More convention information, registration, nomination and scholarship forms will be available in the March 2026 issue of the Western Whirlwind.



SWO President Michelle Lauckner
at the Innovation Leadership
Summit at the ELCA
Churchwide offices in Chicago.





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December 2025 Issue

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New Town, ND 58763

**Change Service
Requested**

As a Community of Women
created in the image of God,
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and
empowered by the Holy Spirit,
We Commit Ourselves to
grow in faith,
affirm our gifts,
support one another in our callings,
engage in ministry and action, and
promote healing and wholeness
in the church, the society, and the world.

Please pass along (or copy) to the leadership of the Women of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in your church.